TL4015-18

VII[TH] SYMPOSIUM ON TIMOR OF OPORTO UNIVERSITY
17-20 JULY 1997

The coming confronation in Indonesia
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The big Jakarta-based confrontations that last year attracted international television have disappeared for the moment. But at every other level, there is more political ferment, more political activity, more social protest, more political discussion and more organising today than there was before the crackdown of July 27, 1995. The problems for the dictatorship are being magnified, the potential for a real crisis for the regime is much greater now than before the July events.
There are two key elements to the repressive measures taken on July 27 and immediately thereafter by the military. Firstly, there was the forcible seizure of the PDI (Partai Democratik Indonesia - Indonesian Democratic Party) headquarters and, most specifically, the massacre of over 50 people inside the PDI HQ.
The killings were planned. The commandos, dressed as PDI members, enteredwith pistols with silencers and commando knives. PDI activists released after months in jail are now touring PDI branches telling of how they witnessed fellow activists having their throats slit. Fire engines were on and to hose down the inside of the offices to remove blood. Vans were on and to remove the bodies. This was a planned act of terror aimed at ntimidating PDI leader Megawati Sukarnoputri and her supporters and all the other forces that had been gathering at the PDI HQ, including the PRD (Partai Rakyat Demokratik - Peoples Democratic Party). This terror was as important, if not more important, than the simple ending of the use of the PDI HQ as a democratic forum.
Secondly, there was the arrest of Muchtar Pakpahan, leader of the SBSI (Indonesian Workers Prosperity Union - Serekat Buruh Seterjarah Indonesia) and the order for the arrest of all PRD personnel, and the consequent capture of several leaders and activists on August 11 and following days. The order for the arrest of all PRD personnel was a de facto ban on all activities by the PRD.
The immediate impact of the repression was to halt the snowballing momentum of the defend Megawati campaign. In this respect, the repression succeeded. It halted the conduct of actions carried out openly in the name of the PRD and by removing key leaders and disrupting channels of communication seriously disorganised the PRD structure for six weeks to two months. It also seriously disoriented and disorganised the middle - class student and intellectual based pro - democracy organisations. It has brought a halt to the large and militant Jakarta based mobilisations of June - July, 1996 either by the PDI, the PRD or jointly. But such repression cannot end the under lying social and economic trends that provide the material basis for the growing social tensions. Neither has it succeeded in destroying, or even significantly holding back, the momentum of anti - dictatorship political activity.

The PDI, Megawati and Suryadi

The upsurge in militancy between May and July last year by Megawati supporters heralded the emergence on the broader political scene of another social force: the politicised lower layers of the petty bourgeoisie together with sections of the semi - proletariat. At the upper level of this spectrum - the politicised lower levels of the petty bourgeoisie - we find the working small capitalists in the textile and tailoring cottage industry, small restaurants and shops, two - person motor repair operations, the taxi, mini - bus and trishaw trade, or those who work small farms, mostly employing family and sometimes casual labour. At the bottom end lies the semi - proletariat, the street vendors, tri -shaw and taxi drivers, street-stall vendors, casual labourers and jacks - of- all trades or peasants whose farms provide subsistence to their families but little more.

In Indonesia, a country of 200 million people where large - scale capital has only developed in the last 15 years and where rice and tree-crop agriculture is still dominated by small farms, this is a massive social sector - far bigger than the proletariat. It has played major roles in Indonesian politics, both in reactionary and radical directions.

Under pressure from rapacious big capital, which is gobbling up or ruining small cottage industries and petty traders, discontent and radicalisation among this sector is speeding up. At the same time the semi - proletariat suffers from increased costs for most goods, declining subsidies on the prices of basic commodities, and ever-rising ``unofficial'' taxes extorted by the myriad elements of the state apparatus. This sector also feels increasingly marginalised - politically, socially and culturally. As big capital has developed in Indonesia, it has brought with it an exaltation of the stock market, yuppie cosmopolitanism, heroisation of the wealthy and fetishisation of the Mercedes, the mobile phone and the US school. The new rich and all their vulgarities reign supreme. This state of affairs stands in stark contrast with the dominant populist outlook of the masses, marked by an egalitarian social psychology, an expectation of concern by the patron for the ``little people'' whom he in fact exploits, and dedication to the interests of the nation, which is identified with the interests of the popular masses who fought for independence against the Dutch colonialists.

This contrast between the vulgar free market ethos of the super - rich and that of the populist struggle for national independence and an Indonesia for the ``little people'' (still identified with Sukarno) is now symbolised for many Indonesians in the contrast between the children of Suharto and the children of Sukarno. The super - rich billionaire children of Suharto, grown rich on nepotistic business deals and military backing, contrast with the image of the relatively modest (though still very comfortable) lifestyle of the Sukarno children, such as Megawati.

The petty - bourgeois and semi - proletarian masses see politics through the experience of their social milieu, a milieu made of a myriad of individual operators and personalities. Their inclination, now as before 1965, is to look towards a charismatic figure who will defend their interests. In fact, their support for that figure creates the charisma. At this point in time, Megawati has emerged as the charismatic figure to whom this discontented mass of petty - bourgeois and semi - proletarians look.

The Megawati PDI has continued its agitation among this mass base to campaign against the installation of former PDI presidential candidate Suryadi as PDI head. The framework for this campaign has been the many court actions taken by the Megawati PDI Central Committee as well as provincial and district pro - Megawati committees. The Megawati leadership knows full well, of course, that the outcome of these cases depends entirely on the balance of forces in the overall political struggle. The Megawati PDI has no illusions in the legal system under Suharto. Rather, these huge number of court cases have been used as the excuse for mobilising shows of support for Megawati.

This tactic of using court cases as the venue for demonstrations and pickets began almost immediately after July 27. In early July, despite the announcement of shoot to kill orders for demonstrations, over 40,000 PDI supporters rallied outside Jakarta district court during one of Megawati's hearings. This demonstration blocked one of the main thoroughfares in Jakarta for hours.

This demonstration was followed by many smaller demonstrations and pickets as various cases started to come to court. In December another large mobilisation occurred when several thousand PDI supporters rallied outside a court house in Surabaya, Indonesia's second biggest city and an industrial centre.

In addition to stirring their support base into demonstrations at the courthouses, PDI provincial and district branches have been mobilising this base in protests against Suryadi whenever he appears to officiate at the establishment of pro - Suryadi PDI committees. Almost without exception, Suryadi has been unable to hold such ceremonies without a militant and angry demonstrations of PDI masses shouting ``Suryadi is a murderer''. There is no possibility of reconciliation with Suryadi. He is held accountable for the over 50 PDI members who were massacred inside the PDI headquarters. Anger against him is so great that it is no longer possible for him to appear publicly without a military escort. His car has been stoned and demonstrations in the smaller towns he has visited have been very threatening.

Another reflection of the mood of the masses has been the emergence of a de acto PDI press with an explosive circulation. Several sensationalist weekly tabloids, including Detective and Romance, Intijaya, and Paron have been taken over by pro - Megawati small capitalists, sometimes retired generals.

They have either dropped their usual romance and detective content entirely or supplemented it with front and back page pro - Megawati coverage. Carrying slogans such as ``Down with Suryadi!'', ``Suryadi is a rat'', and so on, these publications have experienced a massive surge in circulation, being sold almost everywhere on the streets by the regular newspaper boys.

Weaknesses of the PDI campaign

There is no doubt that Megawati has approved a course of action based on continued mobilisation of the PDI's mass base. However, the agitation is limited to the issue of the Megawati versus Suryadi conflict, and has not broadened out to take up other democratic rights issues. There are no signs of a move in that direction from the national leadership, although some local leaders have been willing to take up other issues.

There appear to be some differences within the PDI national leadership between so - called moderate and radical leaders. The radicals, who include Megawati, are so described because they support the tactic of agitation and extraparliamentary mobilisation and are firm in their ultimate goal of replacing Suharto with Megawati, i.e., of ending the dictatorship. The moderates are less happy with the mobilisations and are apparently willing to accept something less than Megawati gaining the presidency.

However, the focus of the PDI leadership of the one issue of ``Down with Suryadi, long live Megawati!'' is a serious weakness when there are so manyother issues begging to be taken up, which could mobilise even larger numbers of people. The unwillingness to broaden the campaign and the concentration on small - scale mobilisations may mean that Megawati will also be hesitant to escalate mobilisations to a confrontation with the regime.

The PRD, students and the PDI Although it was the PDI which suffered the loss of over 50 people, it was the PRD who suffered the worse overall repression. No pro - Megawati leaders were arrested and jailed, although the most outspoken PDI parliamentarian on a broad range of issues, Aberson Silalahi, has been put on trial. There is no de facto ban even on Megawati's PDI as there is on the PRD. In a press briefing soon after July 27, the director

general of social and political affairs of the Indonesian armed forces general headquarters,General Sutoyo, stated: ``The armed forces will go after all the members of the PRD. We are not on the defensive here, we are on the offensive. The Anti- Subversion Law will be used against them." These measures disrupted the PRD's lines of communication during the first weeks after July 27. However, the momentum of the PRD's growth and activity has soon revived. This included recruitment from the PRD's pre - July 27 periphery and the publishing of a new underground journal called Pembebasan (Liberation). This circulates among students, the big milieu of young lecturers, worker activists and others. The PRD prints enough for direct distribution to contacts, supporters and other likely recruits. Beyond that the underground photocopy equivalent of the word - of - mouth network expands the distribution. In addition all the contents of Pembebasan are posted on an e-mail list of mainly Indonesian readers, which is now reputedly one of the largest e - mail lists on the world. Operated from the United States, the owners of the list are desperately looking for a service provider that can handle the length of the list.

The PRD has also re - established joint activities with the more militant elements of the PDI mass base. Generally, relations with militant district committees have not been harmed by the repression or the anti - communist black propaganda carried out by the dictatorship.

On December 10, a joint PDI - PRD anti - Suryadi picket was held outside National Police Headquarters in Jakarta. The picket also took up the issue of the imprisonment of the PRD leaders and activists. The Indonesian press also recently reported that in a recent hearing of the trial of PRD secretary - general Petrus Haryanto the court was filled with red shirted members of the south Jakarta PDI branch there to give Petrus moral support. There are also plans in train for joint PRD - PDI mobilisations at later trial sessions.

The PRD's tactical orientation to the militant semi - proletarian mass base of the PDI, through its defence of the PDI's democratic rights and support for Megawati as symbol of the desire for an end to the Suharto dictatorship, is paying off in continuing support from and access to these masses.

The PRD and the working class

The revival of PRD activities described above has been based on its campus strength and its links with the PDI masses in some areas. What about its work among the workers? After all, it was the PRD's fundamental orientation to the rising workers' unrest upon which its advances during 1991 - 5 were based.

The events of July 27 and the crackdown that followed had little, probably no, impact in the sprawling working - class communities based around Indonesia's big industrial concentrations. Strikes and protests over wages, conditions and management abuses continued with hardly a blip. In August a big strike of public school teachers occurred - possibly the first such strike in the history of the Suharto regime. Even during the August - September period, the PRD itself was able to continue with some already planned small strikes. In some areas, however, the disruption to channels of communication and intimidation of some workers identified as PRD pushed their work backwards. Overall, however, PRD organising work among factory workers continuing unabated with their cadre deployed for this area of work virtually unidentified and untouched by the repression. A good example of what is possible was the action on International Human Rights Day, December 10 and 11 last year, in the big Sumatran city of Lampung. For two days, the city was paralysed by a transport strike and student demonstrations.

The main form of transport in Lampung is a kind of mini - bus that carries up to 40 passengers. The drivers must pay 400 rupiah2 to the city government as well as a big slab of their takings

to the bus company. The strike was in protest against a 100 per cent increase in the road tax. Four thousand drivers took part in the strike, covering eight major bus routes. This paralysed the city. The drivers organised a mini - bus convoy around the city, carrying placards protesting the fare increase as well as the myriad of other bribes that must be shelled out to different parts of the state apparatus. They also organised a mini - bus ``convergence" and rally outside the governor's residence. There were constant and frequent clahes with the military. (The Lampung military became infamous for their brutality following massacres of protesting peasant farmers in the late 1980s.) During the course of December 10, hundreds of high school students also joined the protests. They started carrying out lie - down-in-the-street actions. When the military tried to remove them clashes occurred. The students then moved through the city pulling out hundreds of newly planted palm trees along the footpaths as well as hundreds of pot plants. These were piled in the centre of the streets. There were more clashes with the military who brought in trucks to take the students to school but the students stoned them instead. These clashes occurred on and off all day. Meanwhile, campus students held rallies and open forums on three different campuses, the University of Bandar Lampung, the Institute for Economic Studies, and the Lampung Institute of Accountancy. These campuses were surrounded by military but no actions were taken against several hundreds of students. The different rallies made a general call for an end to human rights abuses in Indonesia, as well as raising the central PRD demands for a withdrawal of the five repressive political laws and the end of the so -called ``dual role" of the military.2 The rallies also expressed solidarity with the mini - bus drivers. About 2000 students took part.

On December 11, students from the Lampung State University joined in. A rally was held and about 2500 students were reported to have taken part. The campus was surrounded by military who stopped several hundred bus drivers from joining the students inside the campus. Finally, the students marched out, in good order, inside marshals' ropes, and started a five kilometre march to Bandar Lampung University. More clashes occurred with the military, with several injuries, when mini - bus drivers and high school students tried to break through the military cordon to join the marchers. The marchers reached Bandar Lampung university and held a successful peaceful rally.

Meanwhile, the city remained paralysed for a second day of strike. High school students again held their own confrontations with the military. On the evening of the second day, the city authorities announced that the road tax would drop to the original 400 rupiah per day and action would be taken against the endemic bribery in the transport system.

The Lampung strikes are a good example of the state of the workers' mood at the moment. Their first priority still remains basic economic issues. While the post July 27 crackdown has not affected the rate or militancy of strikes, neither has it increased the politicisation of workers. This remains the basic task and work of the PRD. The fact that by the second day of the Lampung bus strike, bus drivers were attaching political placards to their buses indicates the ease with which they can become politicised in the right conditions.

The ongoing industrial unrest in Indonesia is still mostly organised by factory workers themselves, without any contact with political forces. The PRD's organisation of bases in specific factories and communities and the leading of major strikes and worker protest actions is a part of the process of educating the working class as a whole by setting an example, by showing how things might be done.

The trials and the PRD

Even before the trials started, the PRD won a major propaganda victory. Inthe immediate aftermath of July 27, the military and even President Suharto himself had accused the PRD of

being behind the riots of July 27 and July 28. Yet, when the formal charges were announced against PRD leaders Budiman Sujatmiko, Dita Sari and others there was virtually no mention of this accusation. The PRD leaders were merely accused of being present on the streets when the masses rioted. This backdown was immediately taken up by the media and the armed forces spokesperson quizzed on this. Key generals then started to wriggle on the hook. ``No, the PRD's crimes cannot be summarised down to July 27; they created the atmosphere etc." This was an extreme embarrassment for the regime, but the prosecution had little choice but to drop this aspect of the original accusation.

The accusation of instigating the riots has been completely rebutted by Indonesia's National Human Rights Commission. The Human Rights Commission laid the complete blame for the riots on the government and the military because of their interference in the internal affairs of the PDI. No doubt Suharto now regrets his tactic of appointing the liberal elements of the ruling party, Golkar, and the armed forces establishment to the commission to make it look credible.

The second de facto backdown by the regime is reflected in the fact that there have been no formal accusations of the PRD spreading ``Marxism - Leninism" or ``communism", which is banned by parliamentary decree. No doubt the issue will be raised in the course of the trials, but the absence of any mention of communism in the indictment is a major defeat for the regime. The attempt by the regime to paint the PRD as communist, i.e., in today's Indonesian political culture as evil, treacherous, anti - god, has also failed. At first the generals tried to paint Budiman as a hereditary communist by accusing his father and grandfather of being communists. It turned out that his father is a manager of Goodyear Tyres and had built a mini - mosque in his front yard for the use of his neighbors. His mother is a devoted and pious moslem who always tells the press how she has been delivering prayer mats and other Islamic necessities to Budiman in jail. Meanwhile, the court itself granted a Christmas break for those members of the PRD leadership who are from Christain families to carry out religious activities - a strange concession to alleged atheistic communists. Activists visiting Indonesia all report that Budiman and Dita, especially udiman at this point, are on the verge of becoming popular heroes and real actors on the main stage of national politics. The trial of Muchtar Pakpahan, the head of the US - backed social-democratic independent union SBSI (- Indonesian Workers Prosperity Union), has also won good publicity. But he has not been able to win the same profile for the SBSI itself. He remains a lone individual, highly respected but not really winning any popularity for the SBSI. The reality is that there is an enormous gap in depth of politics between Pakpahan and the rest of his organisation which has become increasingly quiescent. Every act of the PRD has been such that it has been bound to be popular. Now many of the actions and ideas of the PRD that the majority of the population had never previously heard of are being introduced by the regime to the mass of the people. Almost every organisational act of the PRD, every mass action in support of democratic change and social justice and all their documents are listed in the charge sheet against them. The regime never bothered to set them up by staging some unpopular act that they could be blamed for. The regime has not even bothered to bring forward one witness to say that the PRD organised or urged people to riot on July 27. As a result, the regime is left with no option but to accuse them of carrying out what they have indeed actually carried out - a militant but peaceful struggle for multi - party democracy and better economic conditions for the exploited masses. An example of the positive propaganda impact the trials have been having relates to the daily newspaper Republika. This paper is published by the political grouping around technology and science Minister and Suharto busy crony, Habibie. Habibie is also in the running to take Suharto's job when he goes. Habibie's organisational base is the Indonesian Association of Muslim Intellectuals. This is not really a religious organisation but represents an important section of

the layer of civil service and private corporation technocrats, management executives, academics and intellectuals. Most of them trace their political roots back to the Islamic Students Association, which was a main ally of the army in 1965 when Suharto came to power and crushed the left. Between 1966 and 1970 almost all university graduates came from this background as most others had been killed or expelled. This is why this group now dominates the middle executive and higher sections of the Indonesian management world today. In the first days after July 27, Republika was in the vanguard of black propaganda against the PRD. Some of its intellectuals who had once played with left ideas went through the PRD documents to prove that the PRD was a ``Marxist - Leninist" organisation. In December this suddenly changed with an initial sympathetic treatment of the trials. Then Republika carried a long and positive interview with Budiman and announced that it would carry more interview material for the next four days in a week long series. The following day Republika had to print an apology stating that it would not be able to bring its readers the interviews! It is more than likely that this incident reflects a major difference in attitude between the Habibie and other leaders of this group on the one hand and the younger intellectuals they have hired to run Republika on the other. The PRD is increasingly popular among the layer of young intelligentsia in the press, media and the universities and colleges that have developed in hundreds of new institutions over the last 10 years.

Growing problems for Suharto regime

The momentum of the anti - dictatorship struggle is slowly but surely reviving. The class axis of the struggle is clear. Big crony capital, its hangers-on and its military backers are faced by increasing political initiatives taken by a de facto alliance, working in parallel rather than together (except at the mass base in some areas), of lower petty-bourgeois and the semi - proletariat under the Megawati PDI banner plus radicalised students and workers under the PRD's leadership. The white collar workers are still undecided though sympathetic with the PDI and/or the PRD. The dictatorship is faced with increasing possibility of either major social explosion or a massive escalation of the anti - dictatorship movement. Besides the actions by the PDI and PRD forces since July, there have also been several outbreaks of religious sectarian rioting. In East Java churches have been burnt and several people killed and in West Java shops, bank buildings and motor car dealerships have been burned.

The dictatorship has no strategy to deal with the increasing social tensions. It must retain its attractiveness to foreign investment and therefore maintain low wages and harsh working conditions. Its neo-liberal economic policies make impossible any reduction in pressure on the urban poor or the peasantry by subsidising basic commodities and services. The only area where it defies neo - liberal prescriptions is in providing state protection to nepotistic and crony business projects. This increases the burden on the rural and urban poor even more. At the same time, the outrageous extravagance and super - wealth of the Suharto family, the Habibie family, the Harmoko family, the Salim family and others is flouted publicly in new projects, houses and parties. In dealing with the political movements that have sprung from the social tensions resulting from sharpening social inequality, the regime has always relied on terror and intimidation. In 1965 - 66 it used mass terror and slaughter killing at least one million men, women and children. This was carried out to destroy a Communist threat not just to Indonesia but to the whole ``free world". The imperialist powers expressed a massive sigh of relief that the Vietnamese revolution would not gain a new ally in a Communist-led government Indonesia. Between 1967 and 1996, the dictatorship had only ever to deal with a weak and vacillating middle-class liberal opposition, themselves afraid of mass action. But by 1996 it had to deal with an increasingly angry semi -proletariat, whose lives are already

surrounded by violence, brutality and suffering. The semi - proletariat, brought up amidst protection rackets, violent robbery, police-protected rackets and thousands of other forms of violence, are proving themselves quite willing to pick up an iron bar and fight back. Furthermore, the regime faces the opposition of a well - organised, committed group of revolutionaries, who have prepared themselves for repression and possible underground work. There is hardly a leader of the PRD who has not already been in prison at least once, and who has not felt a bayonet pierce their face, back or leg or had electric shock administered to their extremities, like Wilson. A repeat of a 1965 repression always remains an option. But it is a last resort at the moment as it would mean massive disruption to industry and agriculture. In 1965 industry and agriculture had already virtually collapsed as a result of the mismanagement and corruption of the military managers of the economy - at that time freed from accountability to international capitalism. The 1965 massacres were the only way for the emerging Indonesian big bourgeoisie to end the chaos in the economy. Today, the economic costs of large scale repression would be massive. In the meantime, the dictatorship's strategy has two main components. Firstly, it is trying to isolate the PRD from the masses through the attempt stamp them as ``communists". Secondly, it is forcibly preventing the Megawati forces from participating in the formal political system and the elections and possibily causing a crisis through a major electoral victory. Both these strategies are unravelling. Firstly, the regime has failed to isolate the PRD from the masses through its anti - communist campaign. This campaign has forced the regime to ally itself with the most reactionary and culturally bankrupt sections of conservative Islam. Beyond the dictatorship's paid thugs recruited from the lumpen proletariat and children of soldiers, the fundamentalist, rightist and 19th century - oriented Muslim clerics in the government - financed Islamic institutions are the only forces who have enthusiastically taken up the anti - communist call. But this section of Islam is itself isolated from the even the larger community of pious Muslims, which makes up 30 to 40 per cent of the Indonesian population. Budiman Sujatmiko is more popular than these reactionary hypocrites. A more recent tactic by the military has been to revive reference to the``mysterious figures behind the PRD", referring especially to the mysterious figure of Daniel Indrakusuma, alleging he is the pioneer of the movement and its central leader. He is accused of being trained for two years in Cuba as well as in the Filipino New Peoples Army. But this just adds to the PRD's attraction, especially to young people! It also detracts from the military's credibility - why can't they catch him? It is possible the dictatorship will resort to executing Budiman, Dita and the others in the hope that this will demoralise the movement. The prospect of such repressive measures is why nobody is recruited to the revolutionary underground core of the movement until they have been confirmed to have faced serious physical danger at least three times and the membership oath affirms readiness to die. Since July 27, the whole PRD underground has adopted the slogan for use throughout their organisation of ``democracy or death!".

Of course, whether the regime feels confident enough to impose a death sentence on the PRD leaders depends very much on the general political situation, including the level of international support for the democracy movement in Indonesia. As for the PDI, the dictatorship has so far taken the necessary measures to exclude the Megawati PDI from the elections, with the Suryadi PDI appearing on the ballot. But the manner in which the regime has achieved this has created a problem of a different kind. The killings in the PDI headquarters and Suryadi's perceived treason against the PDI masses has turned him into one of the most hated persons in Indonesia. He is no longer just a pro -dictatorship hack and bureaucrat, he is a murderer and a traitor. The general estimation now is that the PDI masses will turn out in full force atany election rally called by Suryadi - but not applaud him, but to tear him apart. It is expected now that any Suryadi PDI campaign will attract the full anger of the semi - proletarian PDI masses -

a social sector not known for delicate politeness. It is this prospect of chaos during the election campaign period that is fuelling rumors of another internal government - engineered PDI coup. How to get rid of Suryadi and replace him with somebody who is not so tainted with the murder and treason of July 27? How to get through the election period intact - after which there will be no ``natural'' opening for mass upsurge. These are questions that are obviously taxing the minds of Suharto's top advisers.

The role and response of the West

The United States appears to be the power most aware of the underlying volatility of Indonesian society. For years it has cultivated links with the moderate elements in the Indonesian labour movement, both inside the government puppet union as well as Muchtar Pakpahan's SBSI. The AFL-CIO, which is notorious for allowing itself to be used by the CIA, has long maintained an office in Jakarta staffed by Americans. The US was intimately involved with the struggle against the Indonesian Communist movement. This goes back to 1948 when US representatives to the Indonesian government, then locked in struggle against the Dutch colonialists, promised support in return for disarming the popular militias and eliminating leftist influence in the national independence struggle. This offer precipitated the first massacre by Indonesians of Indonesians -the 1948 massacre of thousands of leftists and the disarming of over 30,000 guerillas. The US moved quickly after July 27 to condemn the attack on the PDI headquarters. US Secretary of State Warren Christopher later spoke to Megawati, an act that deeply angered Suharto. US Deputy Secretary of State Winston Lord later visited both Muchtar Pakpahan and Budiman Sujatmiko in prison. Lord told the US Congress that Washington's policy was guided by the desire to achieve an orderly process of transformation from Suharto to the next president. This statement focuses on Washington's central concern, namely the lack of any mechanism to ensure an orderly transition to a stable post - Suharto bourgeois regime. At the moment everything depends on Suharto, an extremely dangerous state of affairs for Western business interests. As the situation is developing now, the question of Suharto's succession is becoming more and more tied to the question of the overthrow of Suharto. At the moment the main forces shaping up to challenge Suharto are organised in and around the PDI. While the leadership of the PDI is pro - capitalist and has assured the US of the safety of its investments, it stands at the head of an extremely agitated mass of resentful, angry, impoverished and exploited people who themselves have no ideological loyalty to either Western or Indonesian big capital.

At the time of his overthrow in 1965, Megawati's father, Sukarno, headed a movement calling for ``socialism'' in Indonesia. Knowledge about this lies only millimetres below the surface of mass consciousness. From Washington's point of view, whichever pro - capitalist leadership replaces Suharto, it is important that the method of replacement neither requires nor provokes the involvement of these seething masses.

In his testimony to the US Congress in August, Winston Lord also complained that the US was having trouble in finding other states which were willing to support it in its application of pressure on Suharto to step down in 1998. This certainly applies to the Australian capitalist class and its government. The Australian ruling class has stood alone among the imperialist powers in not criticising July 27 and its aftermath. Exactly while the round - up of activists was taking place and the National Human Rights Commission was issuing a report saying there were ``73 missing'', i.e., dead, after the PDI HQ attack, Prime Minister John Howard visited Jakarta and publicly described Suharto as a ``skilled and sensitive leader''. A little while later ALP leader Kim Beazley visited Jakarta - not to address the independent labour movement nor to visit Muchtar Pakpahan or Budiman Sujatmiko as Winston Lord from the US had done, but

to address the Australia-Indonesia Business Council. It was in this speech he said that ``I have no problem with that", referring to the Malaysian government's attempt to ban the APCET (Asia-Pacific Campaign on East Timor) conference in Kuala Lumpur.

The European Union, under pressure from the Portuguese state, has also consistently raised the question of human rights in East Timor with Jakarta. At the level of bilateral relations, however, only Ireland has been a consistent ally of Portugal. The UK, France and Germany have remained consistently strong supporters of Suharto.

At this point in time, the US is also a strong supporter for Suharto. The difference is that the US is looking for a successor and a method of succession that will not open the pandora's box of rising class struggle. The European powers and Australia do not seem, at this moment, to share this concern or, if they do, are leaving the solution to the US, allowing Washington to be the object of Suharto's anger. It is rumored that Suharto was extremely angered by a message delivered to him by ex - US President Jimmy Carter on behalf of the Clinton administration urging him not to stand again in 1998 for the presidency. It is possible the arrest of Muchtar Pakpahan, the only non - PRD figure arrested and kept in jail, and the recent re - imposition of an already cancelled four - year sentence on Pakpahan is payback by Suharto to the US's obvious favorite in the Indonesian opposition. As more signs of political instability occur, there will be a revival of international capitalist interference in Indonesian politics, especially by the US. In this context, it is also likely that East Timor will continue to be an important international public relations problem for the regime. The Nobel Prize has opened more doors for Jose Ramos Horta. This all means that the dictatorship will have to deal with rising social unrest and political challenge in a climate that will increase the political costs of resorting to the more excessive means of repression. In such a climate international solidarity will be as vital for the appraoching Indonesian revolution as it has been in every other mass upsurge of oppressed peoples.

(To be updated with analysis of the May 29 elections and the situation after the sentencing of Budiman Sujatmiko and Dita Sari.)

Endnotes

1. At prevailing exchange rates there are approximately 2000 rupiah to the US dollar. A 400 rupiah tax could amount to anything between a tenth and a quarter of daily income for drivers, depending on the number of passengers carried.